

# Brother of the Birds

By Louisa Meigs Green



Illustrated by M. Boutet De Monvel

















# Brother of the Birds

A Little History of  
Saint Francis of Assisi

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*By*  
LOUISA MEIGS GREEN

*Illustrated by*  
M. BOUTET DE MONVEL



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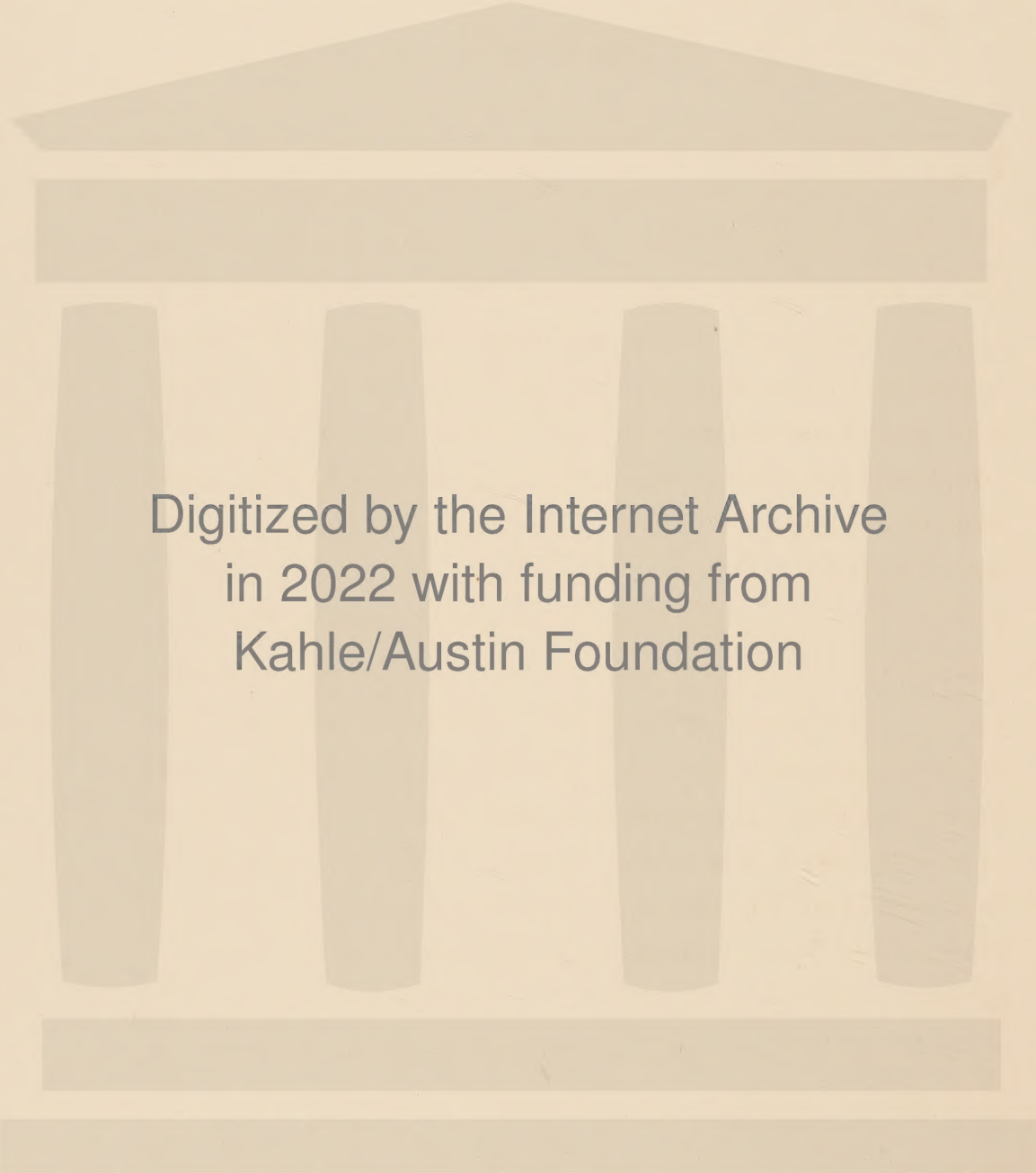
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## Foreword

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**C**HILDREN, this is the story of a man who, more than anyone else who ever walked the earth, was like his friend and Master Jesus. Though he was rich he gave up everything he had so that he could walk barefoot from door to door and from village to village telling people about Christ and how they could learn to be like Him. Those were very proud, worldly days he lived in. People cared more for power and riches than for anything else. They went to war in order to become great and they had forgotten Jesus' teaching. So when they saw a man coming barefoot to their door, a man who had given all he had to the poor, and asked only for a crust of bread to eat, they were surprised, and listened to his words. He was so full of love for all God's creatures that the very birds came to listen to him preach, lighting all around him and sitting on his shoulder. It is told that a wild wolf came and lay down gently at his feet. He loved the sun and moon and the flowers and bees. He was always overflowing with happiness because a beautiful spirit had come to live in his heart. Though he died seven hundred years ago, people still recollect him and tell of his wondrous life.

Because of his happiness of spirit and his courage and his love of all humble things his was a character which men

not only never forgot, but which they loved to tell about after he was gone. Those who knew him told of him to their children and their grandchildren, and they in turn told their grandchildren until there gathered about his name tales and legends of every sort, some of them true, some of them perhaps only what men loved to think might be true. This book tells you these stories of that soldier of Christ.



# Brother of the Birds

## A Little History of Saint Francis of Assisi

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### I

#### SAINT FRANCIS RECEIVES HIS NAME

**M**ADONNA PICA, wife of Peter Bernardone, the rich merchant of Assisi, was very busy and happy. On that day she expected her husband to come back from a long journey. He had been to the fair country of France, land of the troubadours, which had once been the home of Madonna Pica herself. All the house was well swept and garnished with flowers. A beautiful dinner of all the merchant's favorite dishes was ready. But best of all was a gift that was waiting for him upstairs in Madonna Pica's room. In a richly covered bassinet lay a tiny baby boy who had been born while his father was away. His eyes were very dark and sparkling and often he delighted his mother and the nurse by smiling up at them as though his heart were full of happiness. Often he waved his tiny fists back and forth as though he had grasped something precious.

"Surely," cried his mother delightedly, "the little Saint John who played with his cousin the baby Jesus must have looked like this bambino. His name shall be John."

At last came the rush and clatter of horses' hoofs in the steep street outside. Peter Bernardone, the rich merchant, was home with his train of baggage animals laden with velvets and silks from France. Hardly able to wait with impatience, he sprang from his horse and hurried up the steps of his house. There stood Madonna Pica in her long blue robes, and in her arms, smiling and waving his fists about, was the dark-eyed baby who had never seen his father. The merchant, though people called him a hard, close man, had tears in his eyes when he took the tiny baby in his arms. Little did he dream that this child was one day to be captain of a vast army that would spread over all the world, and that he would be known as the Soldier of Christ.

When Madonna Pica told her husband that she had named the baby John he shook his head.

"Dear wife," he said, "my journey has taken me to the beautiful country of France. I wish to name this little son Francesco in memory of that fair land that was once your home." And so Francesco became the baby's name.

Little Francis grew up to be a merry, happy boy. When he had anything given him he loved to share it with his playmates, and because he was gay and full of plans he always was ruler over their games. He was so fond of play that he hardly had time to eat his meals. The boys came to the window and called his name softly. Then he would spring up from the table and dash away without finishing his dinner.

As he grew older his father the merchant wished Francis to work in his shop, and wait on the rich patrons who came









to buy silks and velvets. Francis worked willingly enough but just as soon as the shop was closed he was out and away with his gay companions. Sometimes they sang and danced in the streets all night so that sober folk shook their heads over such doings. And yet Francis was always good in spite of being wild and gay. He loved to laugh and joke but he never spoke a word to hurt the feelings of others. If some young men used words in his presence that he did not like, Francis turned away without answering. And yet Peter Bernardone and his wife Madonna Pica sometimes were anxious.

“Is this our son,” they would say, “going around all night with the rich young noblemen, wearing rich silk and velvet, eating at grand feasts? Is this fitting for a merchant’s son?” And yet they were proud of Francis and liked to see him so gay and popular.

In those days people loved festivals and processions through the streets of the town. Francis always took part in these. He would hang bright silks over the balconies of his father’s house and then when the parade went by Madonna Pica would look out and see her son marching at the head of all the young people. Dressed in a motley suit, half velvet, half common stuff, he would dance and prance along waving his wand, and leading the singers. After him came the painted banners and the drums and music making the steep streets of the mountain town glow and ring with gaiety.

## II

### SAINT FRANCIS AND THE BEGGAR

**T**HUS Francis' early years passed away. More and more he loved pleasure and still there was another love working in his heart, and now and then it took possession of him. When among the rich gay crowd he saw the pinched face of a beggar (and there were many such in those days) his heart would begin to ache terribly. Often he gave away all the money that was in his purse, or even part of his rich dress rather than refuse a poor man alms. One day when he was sitting at the table with his mother, Madonna Pica, she said to him, "Son, what does this mean? The table is loaded with bread and there are only two of us to eat it? Did you tell the servant to bring us all this food?"

"Yes, Mother," said Francis. "We need it all. It is for my poor hungry ones. There are so many in Assisi who have no bread. I ordered it for them." Madonna Pica shook her head but said no more. She loved Francis more than anything else on earth and what he did was always right to her.

Another day Francis was busy in his father's shop. A noble lady had come to buy silks from him, and he was showing her the best that he had. The counter was piled with





M. Bachelier de Valenciennes





bright-colored stuffs, and one after another he held them up for her to see.

"Look at this rose-color shot with gold," he said, and held it up to the light. The lady hesitated and felt the silk with her white fingers. Just then Francis felt a timid touch on the arm.

"I would like to have a silk such as no other lady in Assisi wears," said the lady.

"Not a yard of the silk have we sold here," Francis said quickly. "You will be the first to wear this rich brocade." He held up the silk again. Now once more he felt the touch on his arm. Looking down he saw a bowed thin man, bent almost double.

"Some help, kind sir," he muttered. "I am lame and cannot work."

"Be off with you then," cried Francis. "We are busy here." He turned back to his customer, and the poor man slunk away. The lady still held up the silk and looked at its pattern.

"It would make a beautiful robe," she said.

"Yes," answered Francis, but his heart had begun to ache. A voice that sometimes spoke within him had begun to say, "Francis, Francis, how could you be so unkind? If a message had come to you from some rich nobleman you would have stopped gladly to listen to it. But because it was only one of God's starving children you sent him away."

He began to feel very sad. Suddenly he sprang over the

counter leaving the lady, much surprised, alone in the shop. Running like a deer Francis overtook the lame man and eagerly seized his hand.

“Here, friend, this will help you in your need,” he panted. Then, leaving a coin in the hand of the surprised beggar, Francis ran quickly back to the shop.

### III

#### SAINT FRANCIS GOES TO WAR

**T**HEN one day Francis, with all the other young men of Assisi, went to war. The great cities of those days often fought each other and Assisi and Perugia were great enemies. War had broken out and Francis, all on fire with courage and love of his native town, threw himself into the fighting as he had always thrown himself into his games. Oh, with what joy and courage the gay young soldiers of Assisi set forth. But they were defeated and soon many of them were locked in prison till the war should be over. The young noblemen counted Francis as one of themselves and he was put in the same prison with them.

It was a sad time for the young soldiers who had started out so gaily. Many sat and wept, others were sunk in silence and sadness. But Francis went about among them laughing and cheering them all. Wherever his gay face was seen the prisoners began to take heart.

One poor soldier in particular was suffering unhappiness. In some way he had offended his comrades and not one of them would speak to him. He sat alone in his corner deserted by everyone, the very picture of loneliness and despair. Then one day Francis came by and laying his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder, asked what was the matter. With tears



the prisoner told his story and Francis then took him by the hand and led him back among the other soldiers.

“Ask pardon for your fault and then let us all be friends again,” Francis said and so the breach was healed.

At last the war was over and Francis and his companions returned to Assisi.

It must have filled Madonna Pica's heart with joy to see her son coming back safe and unhurt. And yet Francis was not quite the same as when he started. He no longer cared for the same things and he grew restless and unhappy. Then he fell ill, and for a long time he lay tossing on his bed. Madonna Pica nursed him and did all she could for him, yet it was long before he was well again. Some strange thing was working in his heart and when he tried to enjoy his old pleasures they seemed worthless to him.

## IV

### A VOICE SPEAKS TO SAINT FRANCIS

**A**T last he was well and strong again and once again Assisi rang with news of war. An army was being formed to march against the enemy in Sicily. A nobleman of Assisi was about to join and Francis volunteered to go with him as his squire.

All was excitement in Peter Bernardone's house when the day came for Francis to set forth. The merchant had seen to it that Francis should be dressed as was fitting for a rich man's son. Suits of velvet, shields and swords and daggers, a hat with sweeping plumes, and everything of the richest and best had been provided. Francis was wild with joy. He flew all over the house saying goodbye to the servants and trying to comfort Madonna Pica. As for her, poor lady, she sat and wept when she saw her boy making ready for war again.

"He came back safe the first time. This time it may be different," she sobbed. But Francis laughed at her fears. What a glorious thing it was to go to war! In those days people became rich and great by the spoils they took in battle. So Francis' heart was set on making a great name and fortune for himself.

He went out in the street to say goodbye to some of his

comrades and now a strange thing happened. While he was hastening along in his fine soldier's uniform he felt a timid touch on the arm. There beside him stood a poor gentleman whom he had known years before. Suffering and want had made this poor man's eyes large and hollow. His hand shook as he laid it on Francis' arm. He was shivering with cold and his tattered cloak was gathered closely round him.

Suddenly that strange something that was at work in Francis' heart took hold of him. He tore off his own beautiful cloak and tunic, and put them round the poor shivering nobleman. The plumed hat he placed on the poor man's head and then, wrapped in the ragged cloak that had fallen to the ground, Francis ran home.

That night he had a very strange dream. He had rolled and tossed a long time before going to sleep; then at last he seemed to open his eyes and find himself in a great hall. All around him were hung swords and shields and arms of every kind. They shone like silver and Francis clapped his hands at the beautiful sight. He wandered through the great hall and everywhere were beautiful things as if it were the palace of some great prince. In his dream he cried out, "What is this place? What are these arms and this palace full of lovely things? Whom do they belong to?"

Like a whisper came the answer, "These arms are all for you, and this palace is yours. You shall fight a good fight with many soldiers under your command. Take these arms and fight for the great king."

When he awoke Francis was trembling with joy.



"When I come back from war I shall be a great, powerful prince," he cried to his mother, and all on fire he mounted his prancing horse, took his sword and spear, and galloped away in the train of his noble master.

But how strangely things often turn out! Francis had gone no further than Spoleto when another thing happened that changed his life forever. While he was riding along he suddenly felt strange and ill. He threw himself down on the ground for a little rest and as he lay there half asleep, he seemed to hear the same whispering voice.

"Francis," it said softly, "where are you going? What do you seek?"

"Earthly honor," replied Francis in his sleep.

"Which can reward you more, the master or the servant?" whispered the voice.

"The master," Francis said.

"Why then do you desert the master for the servant?"

"What shall I do?" cried Francis bewildered, and the voice answered distinctly,

"Return to the city, and there it shall be told you what you must do. You have not yet understood the meaning of your dream."

Francis awoke suddenly. Here he lay beside the road and there was no one with him. In the distance he could see the dust of the horses' feet as his noble master and the soldiers went on their way to war. But now Francis knew he could not go with them. He who had been all on fire to fight in battle and earn riches and fame must go back to the city he

had come from. Why he did not know, but he must go back. People might laugh at him and call him coward. All his pride and enthusiasm had gone like a puff of dust. He felt sad and humbled but he must go back. Slowly he mounted his horse and slowly he rode back into the city. Though he did not know it he had fought one of the greatest battles of his life. And though he felt beaten and ashamed he was victorious. Some people shook their heads and laughed behind their hands when they saw Francis ride back into the streets of Assisi.

“You did not stay long. Is the fighting all over so soon?” some cried derisively. But Francis did not answer. Silently he entered his father’s house. Madonna Pica welcomed her son with surprise and joy but even she was disappointed. She too had expected something different. As for Peter Bernardone he shook his head.

“A strange son for a sensible man to have,” he murmured. “First giving away a rich suit to a beggar. Then all on fire for war one day. Back home the next day with no reason for his change of heart. A fool or a coward? Or both?”

Francis felt the sting of these thoughts even though they were not spoken. He felt beaten and sore and his pride was humbled to the dust.

## V

### SAINT FRANCIS FALLS IN LOVE WITH LADY POVERTY

**H**IS gay companions were glad to see their leader back again for no matter what reason. They welcomed him joyously and since they wished to hold a banquet they brought their money to him so that he could arrange the feast. Francis once more threw himself into their plans. He arranged the dinner, and was merry as ever when they gathered together round the table. After the feast was over they danced out into the streets, laughing and singing as was their habit. Francis, wand in hand, walked behind the gay crowd. Then suddenly, as it had happened before, the strange feeling took hold of him. A beautiful light seemed to shine on him, and he felt so happy that his heart stood still. The gay young men who had been dancing and singing looked back for Francis, and when they saw that he stood quiet and alone ran back to ask what was the matter.

“Well,” they cried. “Here he stands like a moon-calf! What are you so busy thinking about? Are you in love?”

“Yes,” Francis answered, and smiled back at them. “Yes, I am in love and I have a beautiful bride, more rich and lovely than you have ever seen.”

“Who is she?” cried the boys.

“Her name is Lady Poverty,” Francis whispered.



He meant by this that he had at last chosen the life that was to be his and that he gave up all riches and pleasure so that he could live and work for others.

The boys began to laugh. They did not know that it was the beautiful spirit of Love in Francis' heart that had spoken.

And now every day when they came to look for him in his father's house, Madonna Pica said, "Francis is not here."

"Where is he? What can he be doing?" they said and went away disappointed.

But while the young men looked for him Francis was sitting in a great mossy cave on the side of the mountain. He had fled there so that he could be alone. When he sat there, all quiet with only the birds who hopped in and out looking at him with their bright eyes, he felt happy and content. He felt as if he had found a precious diamond hidden in this cave. It was there that he felt the beautiful light shining on him and heard a gentle voice speaking in his heart. Little by little he came to understand what that voice told him. He must give up all his money and fine clothes and his fine home, and go out into the world to try to help the poor and suffering people that he saw all around him.

Now when he walked on the streets of Assisi his eyes could see nothing but the pale faces and thin hands of beggars. It had been a hard year and the farmers had lost all their crops. So in spite of hard work many good men and women had to beg to get food for their children. To these Francis would never say no.



W.D. & H.O. Widdows





"Some bread, good master, some bread," a poor starved woman cried one day. She held up her baby, all thin and pale with hunger, for him to look at. Francis had not a penny in his pocket. He had given away all his money to other poor creatures. But his eyes fell on the silken cuff of his fine suit.

"I have no more money, but take this. You can sell it," he answered. Going into a doorway, he pulled off his rich shirt and dropped it on the ground. Then wrapped in his cloak he hurried away. Now, more than ever, the table at Peter Bernardone's house was loaded with bread. After meals Francis quickly put what was left in a bag and hurried into the streets to give it to his hungry sparrows.

Everywhere he looked he saw work that needed to be done. The churches were falling into ruins. People in those days were so full of their love of money and fine clothes that many forgot to go to church at all. Many people were rich and had everything that money could buy. But many more were starving. And while this was so Francis could not enjoy his beautiful home. He hated his rich velvet suits and used to think, "Oh, if I could get rid of it all. If I could go far away and live with these unhappy ones, begging my way from door to door as they do. Then I could help them because I would be a real brother to the poor."

## VI

### SAINT FRANCIS GOES TO ROME

**A**T last one day he told Madonna Pica, "Mother, I wish to go on a pilgrimage to the great city of Rome."

His mother was glad and made ready for his journey. She packed his fine suits of velvet, his silken caps and hose. She wanted her son to look handsome when he reached the great city. How surprised she would have been to know what would happen.

Francis journeyed to Rome and though there were many robbers on the way in those days, he arrived safely with a pocket full of money. His eyes opened wide when he saw the grand city and the crowds hurrying to and fro. The great church of St. Peter was all ablaze with lights. Pilgrims from all parts of the world were there who had come to pray. Many of these pilgrims were rich noblemen all clad in fine armor or velvet, but when they gave their offering to the church it was often just a few pennies. Francis saw them with surprise. What was the good of coming so far when one gave only such stingy gifts as this. Francis walked up to the great altar and opening his purse shook out all the money and it fell clattering on the ground. People looked up in surprise.

"Who is this boy? Is he some rich prince?" they asked each other. He made them ashamed of their stinginess.

But Francis went out of the church and stood on the steps among the beggars.

"Here is where I belong," he said to himself. "With the poor and the sick and the unhappy." He saw a poor old man wrapped in rags.

"Give me your rags and take my cloak," Francis begged eagerly.

"Why, noble sir? You cannot wear rags," the beggar protested.

"Yes, I can wear them," Francis said and put the tattered cape around his shoulders.

All day he stood on the steps dressed in rags and begged from the rich men who went in and out.

"Now I know how it feels to be a beggar," he said to himself.

One day soon after this the Bishop of Assisi was sitting alone in his garden. The gate opened and a pale, dark-eyed boy came in and fell on his knees before the good old man.

"Help me, help me," the young man said. "I want to be a soldier of Christ. I want to serve God. How shall I begin? I am so unhappy. Tell me what to do."

Then the good old Bishop laid his hand on Francis' head and said, "Be of good cheer, my son. God has called you. Wait patiently and in good time He will tell you what to do."



## VII

### SAINT FRANCIS MEETS A LEPER

ONE day Francis was sitting in his cave high up on the mountain. Out in the sunshine birds were hopping about and now and then a little lizard scuttled over the stones, but Francis did not see them. He was thinking about what he must do. Suddenly a silvery voice, clear as a bell, seemed to speak beside him.

"Francis," it said, "you must change and hate all these things that once you loved and longed for if you wish to know my will. When you have put your hand to my task all that which once filled you with love and happiness will seem bitter and displeasing to you, while that which disgusted you and filled you with horror will turn to love and heavenly sweetness."

Next day, while Francis was riding near Assisi his prancing horse suddenly came to a stop. A horrible looking creature stood in the road before him and at the sight even the horse shied and trembled. It was a man all bent over leaning on a stick. His face was half hidden by a cloth but under it one could see that the face was all eaten and disfigured by a terrible disease. His hands were only stumps from which the fingers had fallen. He was white as if ashes had been sprinkled on him. Francis turned faint. He knew this was a leper and he had never been able to stand the sight of these



M. Boulet de Monvel.





poor sufferers. But something in him made him dismount from his horse. He came near the terrible figure, took one of the maimed hands in his and kissed it. He placed a piece of money in the leper's pouch and whispered, "Brother, be of good cheer. God has not forgotten you."

The poor leper bowed his horrible face and burst into tears. It was the first act of love that he had met with in many years. He seized Francis' hand and pressed on it a kiss. It seemed to him as if an angel had whispered to him a word of hope. Francis sprang on his horse and rode away. But now a glory seemed to shine on his road. He knew that the fight was won. He had conquered his old self. Always before when he had come near a leper he had put his hand over his eyes and turned the other way so as not to see. Even if he gave money to the poor creature he had his servant give it rather than come near. Now Francis felt himself the friend of these unhappy ones who were shunned and hated by all the world and his heart was bursting with joy. It had really come true that what he hated most had turned to heavenly sweetness.

## VIII

### THE SILVER VOICE

SEVERAL days later Peter Bernardone said to his son, "Francis, take this roll of velvet and ride for me to Foligno and sell it in the market."

"Willingly, Father," Francis replied.

It was a beautiful morning in spring and he was glad to ride out of the noisy town on the mountain road. Birds were singing and Francis felt happy as children do when they know some beautiful gift is coming to them. On the mountain side he passed a little half-ruined church nestled down beside the way. Something made Francis stop his horse and enter. It was dark and quiet there, only one light shone before a picture and Francis went and knelt down before it. It was a lovely picture of the Saviour. The eyes seemed to look lovingly at Francis and the lips almost seemed to be speaking.

Suddenly that silver voice that Francis had been hearing in his heart seemed to say, "Francis, my son. Do you not see that my church is falling into ruins? Go quickly and build up its walls."

Francis looked up at the picture in surprise. Could it be that it had actually spoken? Was this the message he had been waiting for? He looked around him. All was ruin and decay. There were great holes in the walls that only the ivy

seemed holding together. The roof leaked and dampness had ruined the pavement.

"Here at last is something I can do," Francis said joyously. "I will try to rebuild this little church where people come to pray. Then I will feel that I have made a beginning." And he hastened out of the chapel. He did not know that a much bigger task was waiting for him. It was not only the little ruined chapel that needed to be rebuilt. It was men's faith in God, and this too he was to do. But now his mind was full of nothing but the little church of St. Damian.

He took up his bale of velvet, sprang on his horse and galloped to Foligno. There in the market he sold his goods and with the money in his pouch, started homeward. His mind was full of plans for rebuilding and when he came near the poor little chapel he stopped again.

A gentle grey-haired old priest stood in the doorway with a great key in his hand. He was about to lock the chapel for the night. Francis came up to him eagerly.

"Good day, Signor," said the priest.

"Yes, it is a good day," cried Francis, "for on it I have sworn to build up the walls of your little church. Here, Sir Priest, take this money," and he emptied the pouch into the old priest's hand.

"But, my son, where does this money come from?" The priest spoke kindly but he did not know what to make of the eager boy.

"Take it. There could be no better use for it than this,"



said Francis. He had forgotten his father completely. He was all on fire to carry out his new task. Breathlessly he told the old priest of it and so that not a day might be lost, he begged that he might spend the night in the priest's cottage close by the church.

The good old man was perplexed. He had last seen Francis riding in a procession through Assisi at the head of his drunken laughing friends. Now he came with money and this strange scheme for rebuilding the church.

"You may spend the night with me and welcome," he said, "but the money I will not take."

"Then neither will I take it," Francis cried and threw it down on the window-sill of the church. "What is money in comparison with the treasure I have found? I am at last a soldier of Christ."

## IX

### SAINT FRANCIS QUARRELS WITH HIS FATHER

MADONNA PICA looked long through the window waiting for Francis to come home.

"What has happened?" she thought anxiously. "There are so many robbers on the roads. Could they have waylaid him?"

When Peter Bernardone came back from his shop he too became uneasy. The boy had a large sum of money with him. Perhaps something had happened. All night Bernardone and his servants were riding through Assisi and on the road to Foligno searching for the lost Francis. Someone on the road told them, "Why, your son is with the old priest by the ruined chapel. He stayed the night with him and says he is going to live there henceforth."

Furiously angry was Peter Bernardone. So this was a new prank of his strange son! Well, he would soon settle that. He came up to the chapel and there the poor old priest told him all that had happened.

"Where is he, this thief? He has taken my money," shouted Bernardone. "Bring him to me."

But Francis could not be found. He had fled to his cave in the mountains.

Madonna Pica wept bitterly when her angry husband

came home. Her heart was almost broken for she loved Francis more than anything in spite of his strange ways.

"If only he could stay at home and be like other people," she sobbed.

A little boy came and whispered to her that Francis was hidden in a cave in the mountains so every day she sent him a basket of food.

At last Francis said to himself, "Come, since I am the soldier of Christ I should fear no one." So he walked bravely back to Assisi. Oh, what a reception awaited him. The very boys on the streets threw stones at him.

"Thief! Crazy man!" they shouted.

Francis had always loved those street-boys and they had loved him as long as he was rich and happy. Now they jeered and made faces at him. News came to Madonna Pica that her son had returned and she hastened out to throw her arms around him. But Peter Bernardone fairly bellowed with rage.

"So he has come back, the thief, has he? He shall see how I treat those who rob me."

Francis stood pale and quiet before the door. His dark eyes looked straight into his father's.

"Take him, the villain, lock him up in the cellar. Perhaps that will cool his wits," roared Bernardone and the servants made haste to obey.

There in the darkness and cold Francis stayed for several days. Then at last his father went away on a journey and Madonna Pica came and unlocked the door. She came in and



sat down by her son weeping and begging him to change his mind and obey his father. Then, since she could not make him change she unlocked his chains and let him go free. Francis kissed his mother goodbye. It was for the last time. Then he went out of his father's house forever. He hastened back to the little chapel and stayed there with the old priest.

When Bernardone came home he was furious at finding his son gone. He stormed at Madonna Pica and then went to the court where he made a complaint before the consuls of Assisi, demanding that they force Francis to come back and to return the money he had given away. The consuls, seeing him in such a rage, ordered Francis to come before them and sent out the crier with his big bell through the town to look for him. When the crier found Francis he answered, "I have nothing to do with consuls. I am a soldier of Christ and Him only do I serve."

The consuls knew not what to do so Bernardone went to the Bishop of Assisi. He sent word begging Francis to appear before him and the young man came willingly, saying, "Yes, I will come before the Bishop for he is my captain now."

The bishop spoke kindly to Francis. He said, "Your Father is terribly shocked and troubled by you, my son. If you wish to serve God give back the money you took. It is not thus we must find money for the church. Put your faith in God and have courage. Fear nothing. He will come to your aid and will send you in abundance what is necessary to rebuild the little chapel."

And so Francis went willingly to find the money that he had thrown down on the window-sill and brought it back before all the people.

Peter Bernardone stood angrily scowling when Francis came near. The young man looked his father in the face and spoke, "Lord Bishop, I wish not only to give back the money that is my father's but also the clothes that he gave me." Going into another room he quickly took off his rich suit and laying the money on top, walked into the hall before the bishop and all the people.

"Listen, all," he cried. "Until today I have called Peter Bernardone my father but because I have resolved to be a soldier of Christ, I give back to him his money, the loss of which has made him so angry, and the clothes that he gave me. Henceforth I wish to say, 'My Father who art in Heaven,' and not Peter Bernardone, my father."

The people saw that next his skin under his fine clothes, Francis wore a hair shirt. His father snatched the money furiously and went away but the good bishop rose and threw his arms and his great cloak protectingly round Francis. He saw the courage of this new soldier and from that time he became Francis' friend and counselor, and loved him dearly.







## X

### SAINT FRANCIS GOES ABOUT HIS MASTER'S WORK

**N**OW Francis had broken forever with his old life and threw himself gaily into the new one. He came back to the little church of St. Damian and made for himself the sort of habit that he was to wear ever after. It was a long coarse robe with a hood. He was barefoot and bare-headed, but never in his richest days had he felt so happy. He thought of nothing now but how he could serve his great Master. He walked the streets of Assisi singing and praising God. He was actually drunk with joy, as he went about finding stones to rebuild his church.

"Who gives me a stone," he said, "shall have a reward. Who gives me two stones shall have two rewards. Who gives me three shall be rewarded three times."

People stopped to look at him in wonder.

"He's crazy," some said. "A fool," remarked others. The gay young noblemen with whom he had once danced and dined looked on and laughed but Francis, his eyes sparkling with joy, carried heavy stones on his back to the little church. He laughed and sang when street-boys threw stones at him. All day long he worked on rebuilding the walls and then at night, worn out, he lay down to rest in the old priest's cabin.

He looked so tired and pale that the good old man grew afraid. "The boy is not used to rough toil," he said to himself. And so he cooked meals more dainty than he would have eaten and brought them to Francis. But the soldier of Christ would not allow this. He said to himself, "Francis, is this the life of poverty you promised to lead? Better to go like the poor beggars from door to door. Then you will be living like one who was born in a manger and who lived all his life in poverty, among the humblest of men."

So next day Francis took a wooden bowl such as beggars use and walked into Assisi. There he went from door to door asking gently for a little bread.

"Get away, beggar," some people would cry. Others would throw into his bowl a few scraps such as we give to dogs. Some people who used to know Francis while he was rich burst out laughing when they saw what he was doing.

"Your fine son is begging his bread now," they told his father. "What next?"

Peter Bernardone gnashed his teeth with rage.

"He'd better not come near me," he thundered. "I'll break every bone in his body."

But Francis went on his way smiling and happy. At first it was hard for him to eat the coarse scraps that were thrown in his bowl. They made him feel sick. But after a while they tasted better to him than the finest cakes.

When his father shook his fist and swore at him, Francis called a poor old beggar man to his side and said, "Come with







me and I will give you half of all that is given me. You shall be my father now."

One night he came near a house that was all lighted up, with music floating out through the open windows. Francis looked in, and whom should he see but his old friends and companions, gathered round a great table that was covered with candles and good things to eat. All the young men were singing and laughing and drinking, just as Francis used to do. Pulling his hood over his face he passed on, ashamed that his old friends should see him. But then he stopped.

"I am a soldier of Christ. Why should I be ashamed?" he asked himself, and turning back went quickly into the house where the feast was going on. The young men stopped singing. It was as if a spirit had appeared before them for there stood their old friend Francis. He was very thin, his face was pale and he was dressed in a long coarse gown.

"Friends," he cried, "give me money to buy stones. I wish to rebuild my Father's house. Give me a little money, I pray you."

The young men gathered round him. They grasped the thin hands held out to them. Many dropped coins into his pouch. "Stay with us, Francis," they begged, but he shook his head.

"I must be about my Father's work," he answered, and went out again into the dark street.

Some time after that some children in the country near Assisi met a young man dressed all in brown, walking barefoot on the dusty road. His head was bare. He had a rope tied

round his waist in place of a belt, and he carried a wooden bowl in his hand. "Just a beggar," they thought and then they noticed his face. It was so full of happiness that it seemed to shine with a strange light. His eyes were as bright as those of a bird and he laughed as if he knew some wonderful secret. It was Francis.

The children drew near and he sat down on a great stone to talk with them.

"Who are you?" asked the children.

"I am God's soldier and I am going into the wide world to fight for Him."

"But you have no sword. How can you fight?" the children asked.

"I do not need a sword because I have no gold, so no robber will come near me. And my only enemy is Sin."

The children looked at each other. Then the young man laughed and took the youngest child on his lap.

"Let me tell you a story," he said. The children sat down around him and he told them in child-like words the story of Jesus, and the great lesson that He came on earth to teach. Soon older people came by and began to listen. The young man's words seemed to fly like birds into their hearts. This was not a learned priest in a grand church preaching to them. This was a poor beggar-man, poorer even than they. They listened till the sermon was over then they begged the young man to come home with them. When he entered the humble cottage he said, "Peace be unto you." In his presence the babies stopped crying. The dogs came up and sniffed his

brown robe, then lay down at his feet. The tired mother looked into his bright smiling eyes and felt comforted. All night a blessing seemed to rest on the humble little house. In the morning the children begged the young man to stay. But he helped them with their morning tasks, and then saying goodbye went out on to the dusty road again.

"I have many, many miles to travel," he said. "My Master has many lambs, and I must feed them all. Fare you well and do not forget my words."

Thus Francis went out into the world to preach. He had built up the walls of the little church of St. Damian and now he must build up the walls of that greater church, men's faith in God.

Many wicked men and women when they heard his words, turned away from sin, and became good once more. Two years passed away and the fame of Francis' teaching went far and wide.

## XI

### A RICH MAN FOLLOWS SAINT FRANCIS

ONE evening when Francis was resting with his friend, the good old priest near Assisi, a man wrapped in a long velvet cloak rode up to the door. With a great jingling of silver chains this richly dressed stranger dismounted and came to meet Francis.

"What can I do for you, friend," asked the saint. The visitor hardly seemed to know what to say.

"I am Bernard, the rich merchant," he spoke at last. "I have seen how you gave up everything and became a soldier of Christ. I wish to do as you have done. But how shall I begin? I have a great house and much, much money. What shall I do with it?"

"You can give them back to the One who gave them to you," Francis replied.

"But how can that be done?" Bernard asked.

"Stay the night with me, and in the morning we will go into the church and seek wisdom in the blessed Bible," Francis replied. At sunrise another man from Assisi came to join them. He too wished to follow Francis' example, and knew not what to do, so together they went into the church. The early sun shone in through the windows like a beam of gold, resting on the great Bible with its metal clasps. St. Francis first prayed to God to tell them what







they must do. Then they opened the great book and read what was under their hands, and this is what they read—

“If you would be perfect, go sell all you have and give it to the poor. Ye shall have treasure in Heaven.”

Francis opened the book a second time and read these words—

“Whoever wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.”

And a third time he read—

“Carry nothing on the way.”

Then Francis thanked God and spoke to his new friends, “My brothers, let these be our commands. If any others wish to join us they must follow this rule. Go now and do as you have been bidden.”

Bernard was very, very rich. He had great houses, many jewels and golden chains and rings, much fine velvet, and many costly silks. All these things he sold and taking the many bags of money he brought them all to St. Francis. Then the poor starving people came flocking like hungry sparrows round him and the money was poured out into their hands till not a coin was left. Bernard was now as poor as Francis and like him put on the coarse brown robe and tied a rope around his waist. Soon another man called Egido came to follow Francis, so now he was no longer alone, but had three companions. But where should they go? They had no place to shelter them. Francis remembered a little cabin all in ruins that he had seen once at a place called Rivo Torto and so he went there and they made a humble little house for themselves.

## XII

### THE BROTHERS GO INTO THE WIDE WORLD

**B**UT soon Francis said to the three brothers, "We are now four soldiers of Christ. We must be about our Father's business."

So one morning at sunrise they stood at a cross road and parted, two brothers going westward while the other two went to the south. There were bitter trials and many dangers before them, but they laughed and sang. They were so happy that they almost danced on the stony roads. They sang loudly the praise of their great Captain. They felt light as air because they had given up all their wealth and riches.

When they came to a village Brother Egidio would call the people together and then Francis would preach to them. He told them they must be sorry for their sins and must love God and try to serve Him. Brother Egidio called to the people, "Listen to him. These are words of life."

But the people looked at each other and whispered, "Who are these men? What is this they are telling us?" People in those days loved riches and pleasure. They had forgotten the teaching of Jesus. Who were these people who came to wake them up with strange words?

"They are fools or drunkards," some people said.

"But can drunkards or fools speak such wonderful things?" others asked. "They are poor. They do not ask







for money. They work with their hands to earn bread. Surely we should listen to them.” So many people listened but many others ran away home and locked the door, afraid of the strangers.

But the brothers went all around the countryside. In the early mornings the villagers would march out to the fields to do their work. A boy went ahead playing on his pipe and the people sang as they walked along after him. With them came the brothers in their brown robes.

“Let us work, too,” they begged the farmers. “We want no money. Only a crust of bread.” Then they would work all day in the wheat field or tossing hay. When the sun went down like a red ball in the west they were tired and happy. They sang loudly as they walked home with the reapers and after they had eaten their crust of bread and bowl of soup they called the people together and taught them how to pray. Then they lay down and slept on the wheat sheaves or in the doorway.

Thus they went all about the country and at last came back to their little house at Rivo Torto.

## XIII

### SAINT FRANCIS PREACHES TO THE BIRDS

ONE day Francis was walking with one of the brothers. It was a hot day and they sat down on a great stone to rest. Suddenly there was a great fluttering noise and a flock of birds began to circle around over the brothers' heads. Francis looked up and his eyes shone with gladness when he saw his feathered friends.

"Welcome, little brothers," he cried.

The birds began to twitter and one flew down and lighted right on his shoulder. Others fluttered to his feet and sat there looking up at him with their bright eyes. He was so full of love for all God's creatures that they felt no fear of him. And now stretching out his hands to them he began to preach a sermon to the birds.

"Little brothers," he said, "you are so happy flying in the blue sky. God has been very good to you giving you the air to fly in with your wings. He has given you the trees in which to make your nests and the sparkling fountains of water to bathe in. He feeds you though you do not plant or reap and you need never work for your daily bread. He has given you a lovely coat of feathers to wear so that you are always warm. He saved the birds of your kind in Noah's Ark and did not let your family perish. He loves you, little birds, and loads you with good things. So you must not







be unfaithful but must lift your voices always in praise of Him."

While St. Francis spoke the birds sat very still and listened. Then each opened his beak and spread out his wings, bowing his little head, as if to say yes to what he had heard. At last they flew up and some perched on Francis' shoulder and some in his lap while he thanked them for their attention to his sermon. Now he waved his hand to the birds and made the sign of the cross as a signal that they could go. Away they flew, filling the air with a rush of wings and pouring out their hearts in music. Far up in the sky St. Francis and his brother could still see them. And strangely enough when they parted it was to go in four different directions. One company flew east and another west. One flew north and another south, still pouring out their lovely songs.

"Look," said St. Francis, pointing. "It is thus that my brothers must go into all the four corners of the world. Owning nothing any more than these poor birds, and trusting as they do in the care of God, let them go to carry their message."

## XIV

### THE BROTHERS SUFFER MANY TRIALS

A FEW days after this three new brothers came from Assisi and begged Francis to let them follow him. He took them gladly, but they found it was not an easy thing to go about begging for bread. All their old friends turned away from them saying, "What fools these men are! They have given away all their money. Now they have nothing." The good Bishop called Francis to him and said, "My son, this is a hard life you have chosen. Why do you and your followers wish to be poor and have no money?"

Francis answered the Bishop, "Whoever has money must have a sword to defend it. We wish to walk the roads in safety, to that we can give our message. Goods and riches cause much trouble and many quarrels. That is why we have chosen Lady Poverty."

He taught his brothers to look on money as if it were trash and said even if they were to find a piece of gold lying in the road they must pass it by as if it were so much dust.

Soon there were twelve followers of St. Francis. They all found shelter in the cabin at Rivo Torto but it was so small that each had to write his name on a tile of the roof to show him where his place was on the floor when he wanted to rest or pray. One day a rude peasant drove his donkey in through



the door, saying, "Come, we will rest here, too." This made St. Francis angry.

"Brothers," he said, "we will leave this place. God has called us to do His work, not to furnish shelter for donkeys." So they went to a place called Portiuncula where there was a little ruined church and this was given to them by kind friends. Here they built little cabins to shelter them, and ever after it was their only home.

And now Francis sent the brothers out again into the world. They all gathered together and he blessed them. He told them of the dangers that they would meet and how unkind men might hurt them, but he bade them be brave soldiers of Christ and go forth fearing nothing. So they started out, going into all the highways and byways to preach Christ to the people.

"Where do you come from? Who are you?" people asked. With their bare feet and coarse clothes it seemed as if they must be come out of some wild forest. They begged men to love God and be good. Some laughed at them but others listened. Sometimes bad boys would throw stones at them. Some threw mud in their faces. Others would put dice in their hands and say, "Come, play with us." Now and then someone would seize their long hoods from behind and pull them over backward, laughing cruelly. The brothers were often hungry and thirsty. They suffered with the cold, because their robes were thin and they had no coats. But they bore it all with patience and even laughed at their troubles.

When night came they had to go about looking for a place to sleep. Sometimes they lay in the doorway of a church. Sometimes they found shelter in a barn.

One time two of the brothers were in Florence. It was late and they had been begging in vain for a corner to sleep in. At last one of them said to the other, "Look. There is a porch and on it a bake-oven that still may be a little warm from baking bread. Perhaps the lady of the house will let us sleep there."

"Come, let us ask her," said the other brother, for they were both half dead with cold. When the lady came to the door she looked at the two men as if they were robbers.

"Please, for the love of God let us stay here," they begged. Very unwillingly the lady said yes and slammed the door in their faces.

Soon her husband came home and when he saw the two brothers on the porch hovering against the bake-oven he roared. "Who are these men? What are they doing here?" His wife came quickly and began to make excuses.

"They only wanted to sleep on the porch. I thought they could do no harm."

"They may burn us all in our beds," her husband Bruno muttered. "Do not give them anything. They are no doubt thieves who would like to rob us."

All night the brothers lay shivering pressed against the bake-oven. It was so cold that they were quite stiff when morning came. They blew on their fingers to warm them and then seeing a church next door they went in to make their



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morning prayer. While they knelt praying who should come in but Bruno and his wife and when they saw the two men who had slept on their porch the night before they were surprised. Soon after a rich man came to the church as he did every day with a little bag of coins to give to the poor people gathered there. Many starving children came each day to receive his alms. When he saw the two brothers in their coarse ragged robes, he pressed a piece of money in the hand of each. But the brothers quickly gave him back the coins.

"Thank you, sir," they said, "but we do not want money. We are soldiers of Christ and we have given away all that was ours so that we can go about our Master's work." This surprised Bruno and his wife greatly.

"See, husband," whispered the wife. "They refuse money when it is given them. Surely they are no thieves but good men. We should have been kind to them last night instead of letting them sleep in the cold. Perhaps some bad fortune will come to us because of this."

Then she and Bruno begged the brothers to come back and stay in their house. But the rich man said, "No, let them come with me. I am glad to shelter these soldiers of Christ. They shall rest in my house as long as they wish." So the brothers went with him and spent many days in his beautiful palace.

When the brothers had finished their journeys they would return to Portiuncula. And there, all gathered together they told each other the story of what had happened to them, and they forgot all their sorrows in the happiness of being together.

## XV

### THE BROTHERS GO TO ROME

**Y**EARS passed away and more and more brothers came to follow St. Francis. At last there were so many that it was hard for them to find shelter in Portiuncula. St. Francis often wondered who would be their captain if he were to die.

Then one night he had a very strange dream. He saw a little dark hen and under her was a great quantity of tiny chicks. She was trying to cover them with her wings but the wings were not large enough.

"Surely this means something," St. Francis said and pondered the dream to himself. At last he understood.

"Why the little dark hen means me," he cried. "I am little and dark, and some day I shall fly away into the sky. The chicks are my dear brothers. There are so many of them that I cannot shelter them all. So I must go, and see if I cannot find shelter for them under the wings of the holy church. Then when I am gone they will be cared for."

So, taking the brothers with him, Francis journeyed to the great city of Rome. Oh, how they looked around them when they found themselves among the splendid churches and palaces and saw the crowds of people in the city. They were used to working in the fields and walking on the country road. The great town frightened them. And yet they

must go to the grandest palace of all to talk with the great head of the church, the Pope himself. Even Francis was dismayed.

"I am so small and so simple. Perhaps he will not listen to me," he said. Now strangely enough, the Pope too had had a very strange dream. The night before he dreamt that he saw one of the greatest churches in Rome falling down. The wall was crumbling and it would have fallen had not a small, dark man, clad in mean clothes, stood under it and held it up with his shoulder. This dream troubled the Pope because he felt that it was meant to tell him something and he knew not what it could be. Then that day when he sat on his throne in the great palace of the Popes, who should come in but a small, dark man, dressed in a coarse, brown robe, with a rope around his waist. It was Francis. He knelt down before the Pope and told him all the work that he had done and hoped to do. He told about his brothers, the soldiers of Christ, and begged the Pope to take them under his command.

At first the Pope was silent. He did not like the thought of these poor soldiers who wished to fight for Christ but first gave all their money away.

"Why must you live so poorly, my son?" he asked.

"So that we will work with our hands each day to get our bread," Francis answered. "Some who call themselves soldiers of Christ live in rich houses. They do not work. They grow lazy and fat. My followers must be like runners. They must always be light and ready for the race."

“But how will you live?” the Pope asked. “It is hard for men to go about the world getting their living this way. Many others may come after you. Their sufferings will be too great. Why not be reasonable?”

“Because we wish to put our trust in God alone,” said Francis. “He will care for us even as he does for the poor sparrows, never fear.”

The Pope pondered. He looked at Francis’ eager face, and suddenly he knew that this was the man whom he had seen in his dream. He, perhaps, was the man sent to hold up the walls of the church, which had begun to crumble. Men were very wicked in those days and forgot to worship God. Perhaps this man and his army of followers, barefoot and poor, would go throughout the world, teaching them to believe once more.

The Pope took Francis’ hand, “Yes, my son,” he said, “I will take your followers to fight under the banner of the church.”





Hotel de Mianval.



## XVI

### THE BEAUTIFUL CLARE AND HER SISTER AGNES

**I**N Assisi there lived a very beautiful girl called Clare. Her father was a rich nobleman and all her life she had lived in a wonderful palace. Her dresses were of heavy silk embroidered with gold. On her long golden hair she always wore a cap of pearls. Her father loved to have her go to balls and feasts with the other rich maidens and wherever she went she was the loveliest of them all.

One day she was sitting in her room letting the nurse comb out her long shining hair. One of the young girls that she knew came and cried, "Clare, are you not coming with us to church? This is Palm Sunday. Let us go and they will give us each a branch of palm."

"Yes," said another, "and on this day a wonderful man will preach. He is the holy brother Francis."

"And who is he?" asked Clare, watching the comb pass through her hair that was like strands of gold.

"He is a man who was rich once and who gave up all he had and went to live with the poor and served the lepers. Surely you have heard of him."

"Yes," said Clare. "I will go with you."

So the young girls, followed by the nurse, went out into the streets of Assisi. Many people were hurrying to church

and some had palms in their hands. When the girls reached the church door there was a great crowd, but they made way for the rich nobleman's daughter and Clare entered. The church was all lighted and was full of people. Beautiful music echoed up to the high roof as they sang of that first Palm Sunday in Jerusalem. And now a small, dark man approached and climbed the steps of the pulpit. He was dressed in the coarse brown robe of the brothers such as Clare had often seen on the streets. She looked at him with wonder. Was this the Brother Francis of whom she had heard so much? Then he began to speak.

His dark eyes rested on Clare, and from that moment all his words seemed meant for her alone.

"Oh, my brothers, oh, my sisters," he cried, "whither are you going? The time is very short. Listen to me."

He told of the joy there was in giving one's life for others. He told them of the suffering and the pain that were all around them in the world, and how few workers there were to help. He begged them to think no more of riches, and of power, but to remember the beautiful life of Jesus who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Clare listened, and something seemed to change in her heart. Everything she had cared for suddenly seemed vain and useless. She began to long as if her heart would burst, to do as this man had done. To go out into the world and help cure the sorrow and suffering that were everywhere. She knew that sick people in those days often suffered terribly because there was no one to take care of them. It came







to her that she would love to do this work, and with her own hands nurse those who were poor. When the sermon was over she sat perfectly still. All the other young girls went up to get a branch of palm, but Clare seemed to be asleep. Someone brought her a palm and put it in her hand, but she did not move. Then, when everyone had left the church and she sat there alone, she heard a light footstep beside her. It was Brother Francis. He stopped and looked at her. Suddenly Clare burst into tears.

"What ails you, daughter?" said St. Francis gently. "Are you unhappy? Can I help you?"

"Yes," Clare said. "I wish to do as you have done. I wish to give my life to help others. But how can I do it?"

"Be of good cheer, daughter," said St. Francis. "I will help you."

When Clare went home to her father's palace it looked like a prison to her. She hated the costly robes that her maid brought to put on her. She had begun to think of all the work there was to do in the world, and it seemed as if she could not wait to begin.

Next day there was to be a grand ball at the palace. Her mother came to see her dressed in her beautiful embroidered dress but she found Clare crying bitterly.

"I do not wish to be dressed. I do not wish to go to the ball," she sobbed. "I want to be a follower of Brother Francis."

Her family did not know what to make of her. At last her father, very angry, locked her in her room.

"Such foolish notions," he said. "Let her think them over for a while. Then she may come to her senses."

But Clare did not change her mind. She sent word to Francis that she wished to be a follower of his and begged the brothers to help her.

And so one night, after many weeks shut in her room, the old nurse came to her and whispered that all was ready. She unlocked the door and hand in hand she and Clare stole down a little winding staircase to the garden. There they slipped through a little gate in the wall and hurried through the dark streets. On the edge of the town they saw the light of torches.

"What is that?" whispered the nurse. "Oh, it may be robbers. Let us go back." She was shaking with fear, but Clare went on bravely. The men with torches were the brothers who had come to light the way to Portiuncula.

When they all came to the little church St. Francis met them at the door. Clare kneeled down at his feet.

"Daughter," he said, "are you sure? It is not too late to turn back. You are choosing a life that is very hard. Go back to your home unless you are quite certain."

"I am sure," Clare answered.

Then they brought her a great pair of shears and though the nurse wept bitterly she cut off the long golden strands of her hair. After that Clare laid aside her silken dress, and put on the coarse brown robe and tied a rope around her waist.

Then St. Francis laid his hands on her head and took her



as one of his soldiers. That night Clare went to stay with some good sisters who lived near by.

Soon the streets of Assisi were ringing with the footsteps and the cries of Clare's family who had found that she was gone and were looking for her. All night long they searched. Then in the morning they came to Portiuncula and learned what Clare had done. She was praying in the church when her father and kinsmen came in.

"Come with me, foolish child," her father stormed. "Are you a mad woman to leave your home like this?"

Clare took off her veil and showed them her head from which the beautiful hair had been cut.

"I have chosen to be a soldier of Christ," she said quietly. "Farewell. This is now my home."

They tried to drag her away but Clare clung to the stones and at last they had to leave her there.

A few nights after this Clare was looking out of her window. She was all alone and her heart was aching to think of her sisters left behind in Assisi whom she might never see again. She tried to comfort herself but the tears would come when she thought of her sister Agnes. These two girls had never been parted before and Clare was very lonely. Suddenly she heard a voice below the window.

"Clare, Clare," it cried. Her heart stood still. She looked out and there in the moonlight stood a little figure wrapped in a long cloak.

"Clare, it is I," came the voice of Agnes. "Make haste and open the gate."

Then Clare flew to the courtyard and opened the gate to let her sister in. Once more they were locked in each other's arms.

"Agnes, Agnes, why did you come?" Clare asked.

"I want to be with you. I want to work and nurse the sick with you," Agnes answered. "Oh, hide me, keep me. They will come and try to take me home."

So in the dark courtyard Agnes knelt as Clare had done while her sister cut off the long curls of her hair and put upon her the coarse brown robe.

Soon there was a wild stamping of horses' feet at the gateway. The father and kinsmen of the two girls were there, furious and swearing that they had come to carry Agnes home with them. The angry father gnashed his teeth when he saw the two pale girls, clinging together in the church.

"We've had enough of this nonsense," he shouted. "Seize her."

An uncle of Agnes took the child by the arm and dragged her away, but as he tore her from her sister's arms a strange thing happened. His arm grew weak. The frail girl seemed stronger than he was and he let her go. At last, angry and broken-hearted, they all went away and left the sisters together.

Thus began a famous society called the Poor Clares. Soon other women flocked to join Clare and Agnes. In a large house near Portiuncula they made a sort of hospital. Poor sick people were brought to them, and the sisters nursed them tenderly.



M. Beaulieu de Mervel.





Often St. Francis came to preach to them and when he was very tired he loved to rest in their garden. Sometimes his heart was weary and he grew discouraged. Then there was no one who could comfort him like his Sister Clare.

## XVII

### THE STORY OF THE WOLF OF GUBBIO

**N**OW I must tell you of the famous Wolf of Gubbio. It is told that one day Francis and a brother on their journey through the country came to a little village called Gubbio. This village had a wall around it and a gate. When St. Francis and the brother came near they found the gate shut so they had to knock to gain entrance. All the people of the village were huddled inside the walls. Not a farmer had gone out to his fields. They all sat in the market place.

“What does this mean?” cried St. Francis, who could not bear to see people idle. “Why are you not at work to-day?”

“Oh, good brothers,” answered the people. “Do you not know? There is a terrible wolf out in the fields. We do not dare to go and labor though our crops are suffering. Anyone who goes abroad will be seized and torn to pieces by this wicked wolf.”

St. Francis pitied the poor farmers. He knew how much they needed to work in the fields for without labour there would be no crops.

“Come,” he said, “show me this wolf. I will help you.”

“Oh, good brother,” cried the people, “do not go near him. He is fierce and terrible. He will tear you to pieces as he has done with so many others.”



David A. Howell.





St. Francis smiled. "I do not fear my brother Wolf," he answered gently. "Take me to him and I will reason with him."

Then the people wept and begged St. Francis not to risk his life thus.

"The wolf is fierce and terrible," they said. "Do not throw your life away."

But St. Francis was not afraid. He went out through the gate of the town into the fields where the villagers told him the wolf was hiding. They stood afar off and wrung their hands saying, "The wolf will kill him. Then the death of this good man will be our fault."

Suddenly out of the bushes sprang the wolf. He was a great grizzly beast with eyes as fierce as coals of fire. His jaws were open and he crouched as if ready to spring on St. Francis and tear him to pieces. The villagers screamed but St. Francis was not afraid. He held out his hand kindly and spoke in his gentle voice. "Come here, Brother Wolf. Come to me. I will not harm you."

The wolf seemed surprised. Very slowly he began to draw near. He stretched out his great grizzly head and snuffed St. Francis' robe.

The villagers wrung their heads. "Oh, the wolf will kill him," they cried. But wonder of wonders, they saw St. Francis stretch out his hand and gently place it on the wolf's head. Then they drew a little nearer to listen while St. Francis spoke.

"Oh, Wolf," he said. "You have done very wickedly.

You have killed God's creatures without his permission. You have spread fear in the land so that all the people dread you and complain of you. All the fields are desolate because of you. You deserve death on the scaffold like the thieves and brigands for what you have done."

The wolf hung his head as if ashamed before St. Francis.

"But, Brother Wolf, you need not tell me why you did these wicked things. I know it was because of hunger. You were so hungry that you attacked men and beasts to devour them. But listen, Brother Wolf—" here the wolf looked up eagerly at Francis and wagged his tail—"I will make an agreement with you if you will promise to do better. The people in the country and in this village will feed you from this time forth till the day of your death. Then you will not need to rob and kill. Promise me, Brother Wolf, that if they will do this you will no longer harm them?"

Then the wolf wagged his tail more than ever and raised his paw to put it in St. Francis' hand. St. Francis took the paw and held it.

"Now, Brother Wolf," he said. "You have promised me that you will do this. Will you come with me into the town and make the same promise before the people?"

The wolf sprang up as if to say he would go. Now St. Francis followed by the wolf went back into the town. There in the open square he asked the wolf again to promise that if the people were kind to him and fed him he would never more kill man or beast. The wolf once again placed his paw







in St. Francis' hand and tried his best to show that he would ever afterward do as he had promised.

Then the people came round St. Francis and thanked him because he had saved them from this great danger. From this time forth the wolf went about the town like a good citizen. The dogs never barked at him. The children brought him bread and meat and cakes to eat and patted his big grey head. He went in and out of the houses freely. So he lived at peace with the people and when he died of old age the children mourned him as a good kind friend.

## XVIII

### SAINT FRANCIS AND THE DOVES

ONE day St. Francis met a young man who had a cage full of doves. He had caught them with a snare and now was on his way to the town where he meant to sell them in the market. Francis loved all birds and animals so it grieved him to think that these pretty doves were to be killed and eaten.

“Give them to me, friend,” he begged.

Something seemed to move in the young man’s heart and he willingly gave the cage to St. Francis. He opened it and the doves, instead of flying away, came out and nestled in the saint’s arm and perched on his shoulder.

“Oh, my pretty sisters,” he said. “You are so pure and innocent. Why did you let yourselves be caught? Cruel men would take you and kill you, but now I have saved you. Come with me and you shall build nests where you will raise your young ones as our kind Creator bade you do.”

The doves cooed and fluttered their white wings.

“They are like pure souls, so white and glistening,” St. Francis said.

He took the birds back with him to the garden of the monastery and there they built their nests where the brothers could watch over them. When St. Francis came near they







flew down and folding their white wings, perched on his shoulder. And they would not fly away till he had made a sign that they could go.

And the young man who had given the doves to St. Francis came to live with him and became one of the brothers.

## XIX

### THE BROTHERS MEET AT PORTIUNCULA

EVERY year the brothers came together from all parts of the world wherever they had gone and met at Portiuncula. There were so many now that there was no room for them in the little church of St. Mary of the Angels, and they built little cabins out of straw and willow boughs to shelter them. The people all around brought baskets of bread and great kettles of soup to feed them for they loved the brothers and were glad to see them meeting all together. Then they told all their cares and troubles to St. Francis and he advised them. Every day he taught them what they must do.

“I do not wish that one of my brothers should be idle,” he said. “Time is very precious. We must work while it is day. If a man does not work each day with his hands there is danger that his tongue will begin to wag too much.”

There was a lazy brother who did not like to work nor yet to go out and ask for food. Yet he always ate more than all the other brothers. To him St. Francis said, “Fly away, Brother Fly. You do not toil and yet you eat more than all the others. He who will not work should not eat. Fly away.”

So the lazy brother took off his brown robe and left the brotherhood.

Another brother one day had been going about with a







sad face looking very dull and gloomy. St. Francis chided him saying, "The soldiers of Christ must never wear a dark countenance. If we are sad we must keep it to ourselves. God has put us in a beautiful world and given us much work to do. We should always look happy and gay."

And yet the brothers lived hard lives. They slept on beds of hard boards with only a little straw under them. They ate the poorest food. St. Francis called his own frail body "Brother Donkey" because he gave it no rest.

"I have been too hard on Brother Donkey," he used to say laughing. "He has carried me for many years but I have treated him cruelly."

St. Francis always bade the brothers be kind to the poor lepers. He said if any one of them was not willing to serve the lepers he was not worthy to be called a soldier of Christ.

## XX

### BROTHER ANGELO AND THE ROBBERS

ONE day St. Francis was going through a certain desert. As he walked along he met a young man clad in rich clothes. He was riding on a fine horse but when he saw St. Francis he dismounted and came quickly and knelt before the saint.

“Brother,” he said, “I have heard you preach and I wish to follow you.”

But St. Francis said, “My son, you are very rich. You live in that fine castle there and you have everything that heart could wish. You would not be able to live as we do.”

“Why, Brother?” the young man said. “I am a man just as you are. If you can bear hardships so can I.”

Pleased by the young man’s answer St. Francis took him to be one of his followers and named him Brother Angelo.

Soon the young nobleman had shown himself so wise and good that he was made master of one of the houses where the brothers lived. But then one day a thing happened that put him to a hard test.

There were many fierce robbers in that part of Italy. They lived in the wilds of the mountains and when travelers went by they often lay in wait and robbed them. They were cruel bad men.

One day, since they had not been able to rob any travelers

and had no food to eat, the robbers said to each other. "Come, let us go down in the valley to the house where the brothers live. We will find plenty of food there and they will not be able to drive us away." So they rode down into the valley and coming to the door of the brothers' house they knocked loudly. The door was opened, and the wicked brigands entered.

"Where is the master of this house?" they shouted.

"I will fetch him, sirs," replied the frightened brother.

When Brother Angelo came to the door, he saw three men with fierce eyes, like hawks, who glared at him and said, "Give us something to eat." Brother Angelo knew at once that these men were robbers. Without a moment's fear he began to upbraid them.

"You thieves and murderers," he cried, "are you not ashamed to come here begging food? You steal the goods that others have worked for. Must you come here too and beg from us the food that has been sent by good men to help our pious brothers? You are not worthy to live on earth. You have no respect for God or men. Go back to your thieving and murdering but do not come here."

The eyes of the robber chief flashed. He grasped his sword and for a moment it seemed that he would strike Brother Angelo, but the brother looked straight into his eyes and the thief's hand fell. Muttering curses the three strode out of the courtyard and sprang on their horses. As they came through the gate St. Francis entered carrying a basket of bread and a little jug of wine. He had been to the town and

begged these things from a pious friend for the brothers. Now he saw the robbers galloping away and was troubled.

“What has happened?” he asked Brother Angelo.

“Only that some robbers came here to take our food away and I sent them where they belong in a hurry. The insolence of these brigands, coming to beg from us! I gave them a good tongue-lashing.” St. Francis’ face was pale and troubled.

“Oh, Brother Angelo,” he said gravely. “What a mistake you have made! You drove away these brigands with harsh words. It is not thus that we can teach others. Sinners are led by kindness and not by reproaches. Remember what our Master Jesus said, ‘It is not those who are well who need the physician but those who are sick.’ He did not come to call the good people to repent but the wicked ones. That is why he often sat down to the table with sinners and broke bread with them.”

Brother Angelo hung his head much ashamed.

“What must I do, brother,” he muttered, “to redeem my fault?”

St. Francis pondered. “Here, take this basket of bread and little jug of wine,” he said at last. “Go through the mountains and valleys. Follow the brigands as quickly as you can and take them this food that I have begged for and give it them. Then you must go down on your knees before them and beg them humbly to forgive you your rude words. After that you are to beg them in my name not to do any more harm, to believe in God and sin no more. If they







will do so I will promise to give them food and drink and to fill all their needs. And when you have done all this you are to come back to me in all humility."

Brother Angelo's face was pale. He had been a great nobleman and it was hard for his pride to be humbled. Yet he took the basket of bread and the jug of wine and hastened after the robbers.

While Brother Angelo went through the mountains on his errand, St. Francis knelt in his cell praying that the hearts of the wicked men might be softened and that they would turn to a better life.

The robbers had reached their hut among the rocks when Brother Angelo came up with them and gave them the food. They sat down to eat while Brother Angelo told them his message from St. Francis and begged their pardon humbly.

At first they seemed to pay no heed but ate the bread and wine hungrily. But then they began to think and they stopped eating.

"Look at us," said one huskily. "We are wicked men if any such ever lived on earth. What will happen to us after we die? We have killed and robbed our neighbors who never did us harm. Yet here is this holy brother who begs our pardon for the few hasty words he spoke to us, that we deserved for our sins."

The thieves were silent.

"Yes," said another, "he gives us bread and wine that he had to beg for himself. He brings us promises of help if we will mend our ways. Truly these brothers are good men."

“What shall we do?” cried a third. “Every day our death comes nearer. What hope can we have then?”

“Perhaps the good brothers will tell us what to do if we go to them,” said the leader. “Let us find Brother Francis and he will help us so that we may make amends for all our sinfulness.”

So the robbers came in haste to St. Francis. They knelt before him, and begged him humbly to tell them what they must do to be saved.

Then he spoke to them and told them of the infinite mercy of God, that it is never too late to be sorry for our sins and to try to be good.

So these wicked robbers left their home in the mountains, forsook their life of thieving and came to live with St. Francis. He taught them to be good men and with him they served God faithfully all the rest of their lives.



## XXI

### SAINT FRANCIS GOES ON A CRUSADE

**A**BOUT this time many men started away from Italy to go on a crusade. A great army was gathered in Egypt and battles were being fought against the Saracens. St. Francis saw the fine soldiers in their armor, mounted on prancing steeds start off to war. Many years had passed since he too had been a soldier and had come back in such strange fashion from the war. Now his heart was troubled when he saw the armies with swords and banners setting forth.

“Is it with swords that they go to teach our brothers, the Saracens, about Christ? Oh,” he thought, “if I could speak to those poor souls who did not know Jesus. How much better it would be to make them Christians than to kill them.”

So he resolved to cross the stormy sea to the country where the war was going on. With no sword or armor he went out to fight in the crusade.

He came to the seashore and soon, as he went from house to house, men gave him enough bread for his voyage. A kindly captain said, “What, good brother, so you too are going to war? Where are your shield and helmet?”

“Here,” said St. Francis, putting his hand on his heart. “My faith in God will shield me wherever I go.”

“Then come on my ship,” the captain cried. “Perhaps

you will bring us a fair voyage." St. Francis entered the ship and soon they were tossing on the blue waves.

On the ship there was much sickness and misery. St. Francis tended the poor wanderers. He shared his store of bread with the hungry ones and preached to the sailors. Everyone was talking of the war, of how many had been killed and wounded, and of how they wished to kill the infidels.

"Hush, brothers. They, too, are men," St. Francis said. "How much better it would be to teach them the Truth and lead them to Christ."

The sailors laughed. Here was strange talk for one going on crusade. At last they landed. In the white hot sunshine St. Francis went ashore. The town, looking strange to his eyes, was all in a tumult with soldiers. Some were drunk and fighting each other. Some were galloping about on their fine steeds. Some poor wounded ones lay by the road and begged for a little help. The camp of the crusaders was still far away on the desert. St. Francis found a camel driver who was carrying goods to the army and let him ride across the hot sands. Now he came near to where the crusaders were camped. He thanked the camel driver and went to find the leader of the hosts.

In a large silken tent sat the Christian leader. He was a great bronzed man who had braved the sea and the desert to lead his soldiers in the cause of Christ. He was talking with his captains of the battle that should take place on the morrow when a servant came and told him that a good brother wished to see him. The general looked up under his shaggy

brows. He saw a slight figure standing before him and heard a gentle voice say, "Peace be unto you." The soldiers in their armor who stood around the tent sent up a shout of laughter.

"Peace, there is not much peace here," they cried, "and there will not be till the victory is won."

"Oh, my son," said St. Francis. "How much better it would be if we could conquer our brothers, the infidels, with love."

The soldiers all laughed loudly at this and yet they gathered round St. Francis. He begged them instead of fighting the next day, to let him go and speak with the Moslem leader, and teach him about Christ.

"The battle must be fought," the general said grimly, "but afterward, brother, you may go and preach to the infidels."

Next day the battle raged and when night fell the Christians were defeated and many dead and dying men lay out on the hot sands.

Then St. Francis, taking with him a man who could speak the foreign tongue, went over to the camp of the Saracens. He asked the Arabs to guide him to their leader's tent. All around him were the wild sons of the desert. With their long crooked swords and their fierce faces they might have terrified many a brave man, but St. Francis was not afraid. He held up his hand in blessing and murmured, "Peace be unto you." The Arabs looked at each other in wonder. Was this a madman who came among them so boldly saying words they did not understand?

The Sultan was in his great silken tent lying on a divan among soft cushions. He was clad in embroidered robes and on his forehead a great diamond sparkled. All around him were his slaves with white turbans on their heads. A musician was strumming on a lute when a messenger came and told him that a strange man from the crusaders' camp wished to speak with him.

When St. Francis entered the tent a sudden quiet fell on everyone. The musician stopped playing. The slaves opened wide their eyes. What did he want?

The guards stood with their hands on their long crooked swords. They were ready to plunge them into this strange man's heart. But the Sultan raised his hand and spoke, "Do not harm him. Let him speak his message."

Then St. Francis began to plead with the Saracens telling them of Christ. He begged them to forsake all other teachers and learn of Him who told men to love one another. The interpreter tried to follow his words but they came too fast. The Saracens could not understand what Francis was saying, but they saw his face burning with love for all men. When he had finished his sermon he stretched out his hands to the Sultan and begged him to become a Christian. The Sultan had understood only half of what his visitor had said, and yet he felt that this was a holy man who stood before him.

He took Francis' outstretched hands and touched them to his forehead.

"Friend," he said in his foreign tongue, "we do not understand each other but I know this, that you do not hate us.



You come to us with a message of love. We thank you. Go in peace. Farewell."

Then Francis bowed his head, and guarded by the Arab soldiers he went back across the desert to the Christian camp.

He did not stay long with the crusaders. It broke his heart to see men killing each other in the name of Jesus. So he went sorrowfully back to Portiuncula.

## XXII

### THE STIGMATA

**A**ND now came one of the strangest things in all St. Francis' story.

One day he had gone up onto the mountain to pray as he often loved to do. There he was alone with the birds and the bees and the blessed sunshine. Often as he knelt, the baby rabbits crept up to him and hid under the hem of his robe. The swallows fluttered around him. But St. Francis, rapt in his prayer, did not see or hear them. Kneeling for long hours on the ground he sometimes seemed to float away from this earth. He seemed to hear the voice of his blessed Master speaking to him, telling him what to do, and comforting him in all his troubles. He thought so often of the life of Jesus and of his sorrowful death that these thoughts seemed burned into his very heart. Then one day when he had prayed a long time he saw a wonderful vision. Light seemed to shine all around him and out of that light he could see the face of Jesus looking at him and then he saw the cross, and his Saviour stretched upon it. The vision lasted a long time. Then, like a wreath of mist, it faded away. But when he came to himself a strange thing had happened. On St. Francis' hands and on his feet were marks like those on the hands and feet of Jesus. They were round and dark and







stood out plainly like the heads of the iron nails. St. Francis spoke to no one of this and hid the prints with the long sleeves of his robe and the straps of his sandals. It was only after he died that the brothers saw what had happened.

## XXIII

### SAINT FRANCIS MEETS SISTER DEATH

**Y**EARS had passed away and Francis was weary. He had gone on long journeys to teach his fellowmen. He had stood the heat of summer and the cold of winter. He had prayed for many nights without sleeping and given himself only the meanest and coarsest food. He still loved the sun whom he called Brother Sun. He loved Sister Moon, and Brother Fire, and Sister Water. He loved all the beautiful things of earth and all his friends, and still he sometimes longed to fly away like one of his birds into the sky. He was eager to see the Master he had been working for so long. He became ill and was almost blind, and still he laughed and smiled at the brothers who waited on him. The wise doctors came to try to cure his blindness. They had a terrible remedy in those days that they used when all else failed. They would take an iron, heat it red hot, and draw it across the forehead of the sick man. By making a wound near the eyes they thought the fever might thus be drawn away from them. St. Francis told them he would endure this pain hoping that he might see once more so as to do his Master's work.

The doctors came, and the brothers gathered round the bed to pray for Francis in his agony. While they heated

the cruel iron in the fire Francis spoke to the flames as they crackled up the chimney.

“Brother Fire, you are so brave and bright. I have loved you so much. Be gentle with me. Do not hurt me, I pray you.”

Then the doctors took the red hot iron and drew it across St. Francis’ forehead. There was a hissing noise and the brothers who stood by burst into loud weeping. But they heard St. Francis’ voice speaking quietly.

“Why do you cry?” he said. “There was no pain. Physician, you may do it again. It did not hurt me.”

But nothing cured the poor eyes that had almost lost their sight. The time was fast coming that Francis had looked forward to so eagerly. He was staying with the old Bishop of Assisi when the silver voice spoke within him and told him that the end was near and he would soon be free. Then he asked the brothers to carry him to Portiuncula the house he loved best, where his work on earth had begun.

The brothers gathered round him and he took each one by the hand and said goodbye. He laid his hand on the head of each and blessed him tenderly. When they asked him what they could do for him he told them to sing over and over the hymn he loved best. All day he lay smiling and listening. Then when evening came he begged for a little bread and wine.

After he had eaten it he said, “Read me from the blessed Bible.” So the brothers read to him while he lay gazing upward, still smiling happily. Suddenly they saw him rise up

on his bed. He stretched his thin hands out and in a voice quivering with joy he cried, "Welcome, welcome, Sister Death." While they were reading this gentle sister whom he had been waiting for so long had come to free him from his frail body.

They gathered weeping round his bed. Night was falling and twilight filled the little room. Then suddenly one of the brothers saw a soft light hovering over the bed. It shone like the sun glistening on water, lingered a while, then faded slowly away.

They carried Francis to the house of Clare and the sisters so that they could see their loved captain again and touch the marks on his hands and feet. They wept long and bitterly because now he could no longer come to teach them and rest in their garden. And yet they knew he was happy and would not have asked him to return.

So ended the life of one whose whole heart was full of love. He loved the birds, the sun, and the moon, the stars and fire and water. He loved the beautiful earth, but best of all he loved the poor who needed him. In his life he had sent out a great army into the world to fight for his Master.

Even though he had passed from their sight the brothers and sisters often felt that he was near them. When they saw hands stretched out to them for help they sometimes seemed to hear a whisper, "Be kind." When life was hard for them a voice said, "Be brave, brothers. Do not fear."

Hundreds of years have passed away but even now those who love him, walking near Portiuncula, like to think that







some day at twilight they might see his light footprints in the dust. With the swallows fluttering around him they might come upon him sitting on a big stone beside the road, preaching to the birds, telling them that in this beautiful world we must all be happy and praise God.























